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John Muir

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## ALASKA SCENERY.

JOHN MUIR.

The great wilderness of Alaska, with its lofty mountains laden with glaciers and snow, its deep inreaching fiords, flowery plains, and its boundless wealth of evergreen forests and islands, and shining, singing waters, offers a glorious field for lovers of fountain beauty, much of which is now within easy reach of the ordinary traveler.

The trip by steamer, from Puget Sound to the head of the Alexander Archipelago, is perfectly enchanting. Leaving scientific interests entirely out of the count, no excursion that I know of may be made into any other portion of the wilds of America where so much fine and grand and novel scenery is so freely unfolded to view. Gazing from the deck of the steamer one is borne smoothly over calm, blue waters, on and through the midst of a thousand islands densely clothed with well-watered evergreens. The common discomforts of a sea voyage are not felt, because the course lies through a network of sheltered channels that are usually about as free as rivers are from heaving waves;

and, were it not for the briny odor in the air and the strip of brown algæ seen at low tide on either shore, it would be difficult to realize that we are sailing on salt ocean-water; we seem, rather, to be tracing a succession of inland glacier-lakes. Day after day we float in the heart of true fairyland, each succeeding view seeming more and more beautiful.

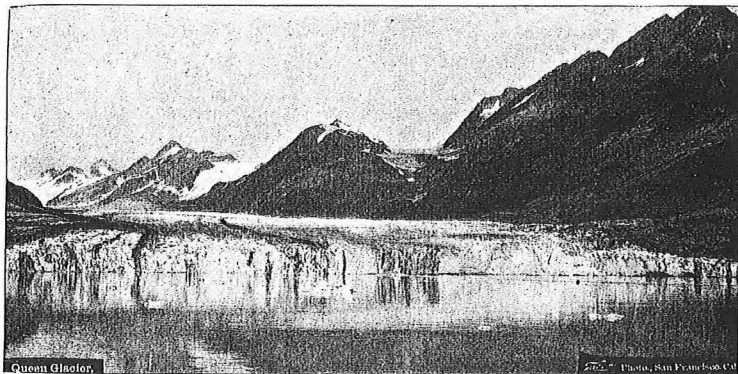
An Alaskan midsummer day is a day without night. In the extreme northern part of the territory the sun does not set for weeks; and, even as far south as Sitka at its lowest point, it is only a few degrees below the horizon, so that the colors of the sunset blend with those of the sunrise, leaving no gap of night-darkness

that are almost always present are then colored orange and red, marking, in a very striking way, the progress of the sun around the northern horizon. The day opens slowly; a low arch of light steals round to the northeastward, with gradual increase of height and span and intensity of tone; and, when at length the sun appears above the horizon, it is without much of that stirring pomp, that flashing, awakening, triumphant energy, so suggestive of the bible imagery,—a bridegroom coming out of his chamber and rejoicing like a strong man to run a race. The red clouds, with yellow, dissolving edges, subside into a hazy dimness; the islands, with ruffs of mist about them, cast ill-defined shadows on the glistening waters; and the whole firmament becomes pale pearl-gray. For three or four hours after sunrise there is nothing particularly impressive to be felt in the landscape. The sun, though seemingly unclouded, may almost be looked in the face; and the

magnificent wall of pale-blue ice would, probably, be found to be not less than a thousand feet in height. Though in general views it seems massive and regular



TOTEM POLE.



Queen Glacier.

Photo, San Francisco, Cal.



View near the junction of Morain and Ice Muir Glacier.

I. W. Taber.

islands and mountains, with all their wealth of wood and ice, and varied beauty of Nature's architecture, seem comparatively dull and silent.

Glacier Bay is of intense interest to tourists. The Muir Glacier enters the bay on the northeast side, at the head of a fiord with lofty, massive granite walls. The steamer sails up the fiord with its load of wondering tourists, making a way through the drifting icebergs with which the waters are crowded, and drops anchor within half a mile of the blue, shining ice-wall in which the glacier terminates. When first observed, at a distance of eight or ten miles, the ice-wall appears as an abrupt, sharply defined barrier about fifty feet high, stretching across from side to side of the fiord, a distance of several miles. Its height above the water is probably three or four hundred

feet, but far the greater portion is below the water and terminal moraine. If the water and the rock-detritus of the bottom were drained and cleared away, this

in form, it is by no means smooth. Deep rifts and hollows alternate with broad, plain bastions, while it is roughened along the top with innumerable spires and pyramids, and sharp, jagged blades, leaning and toppling; and, when the slanting sunbeams are pouring through the midst of all this angular cut-glass of ice, the effect is a perfect glory of rainbow colors. Added to this, and mingling with it, is the irised spray

ever and anon from the plunging bergs as they fall from the wall or rise from the bottom of it with loud-resounding roar, while the countless bergs floating in front are shining also, and shifting the sunbeams, making a very paradise of light in full rainbow bloom.

Impressive, too, are the nights along these crystal cliffs,—the shining of the moon and stars; projecting buttresses and battlements, seemingly far higher than by day, standing forward resplendent in the moonlight, vividly relieved amid the shadows of the hollows; the thunder of the falling masses at intervals of three or four minutes; and the lunar bows with faint iris colors in the up-dashing spray. But it is in the darkest nights, when storms are blowing, that the grandest views are to be had. Then the ghostly bergs, grating and crashing against one another, seem like living creatures dancing in mad delight with the phosphorescent water, which laves them all with silver light; while the great crystal wall is illumined by a glowing fringe of foam beating against its base. Two or three miles above the front, on the left bank, one may easily get upon the



Muir, Glacier, Alaska.

Photo, San Francisco, Cal.

between. What is called the midnight of divided days is here only a low noon,—the middle point in the gloaming, with light enough to read by. The thin clouds

feet, but far the greater portion is below the water and terminal moraine. If the water and the rock-detritus of the bottom were drained and cleared away, this

surface of the glacier, where it is so smooth and free from cracks and chasms that a hundred horsemen might ride abreast up stream for ten miles or more.



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, JUNEAU.